

Chairman Ehli and Members of the Committee, my name is Karen Erdie and I am the Director of Area II Agency on Aging in Roundup, which contracts with the eleven central Montana Counties and the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservations for services provided under the Older Americans Act.

Ombudsman are advocates for people residing in long-term care settings. They are the person a resident or family member of the resident or even the long term care facility can go to without retaliation by someone because of the complaint. In Montana we currently have 130 nursing homes/Critical Access Hospitals and 201 Assisted Living facilities.

Local Long Term Care Ombudsman are hired by Area Agencies on Aging. Within the 10 Area Agencies on Aging, there are only 12.32 Full-time equivalents statewide to:

1) provide monthly facility visits to meet with residents; 2) investigate and resolve complaints on behalf of the residents and/or their legal representatives; and 3) inform the residents and family members of ways to obtain the services for which they are entitled.

\* With the increase of 62 Assisted Living facilities in the last ten years, there has been an increased demand for Ombudsman services. The number of cases the

Ombudsman investigates every year has increased dramatically due to the increased number of facilities and the complexity of the cases. In years past, the ombudsman was dealing with call lights going unanswered or the fact the food was cold. In addition to the call lights and food issues, we now work with difficult family members, with discharge issues when the resident is running out of money or their family member neglects to write the check for several months, mental health and persons with disabilities issues, and with individuals that are being taken out of nursing homes and placed in assisted living facilities. Some of these placements are young people with head injuries or serious health conditions. We are finding the staff at some of these facilities are in need of more training, which the ombudsman, in many cases, is asked to provide. These issues should, perhaps, not be Ombudsman issues, but in reality they are.

The responsibilities of the Ombudsman program require that time be spent in direct contact with the consumer living within a long-term care facility. Statewide Ombudsmen mileage over the past year exceeded 300,000 miles in order to provide the facility visits and complete the investigations.

Thank you for giving your consideration to funding the aging networks request for funding.